

CEMENTERIES

*Graves of the early colonists
are tended by their descendants -*

Duxbury in Massachusetts ... Where the Pilgrim Fathers Rest

By Isabelle Freeman

THE TOWN of Duxbury in Massachusetts was incorporated in 1637, only 17 years after the Pilgrims landed from the Mayflower. The doughty Captain Myles Standish was a founder, and a magistrate until his death in 1656 at the age of 72.

John Alden and his Priscilla, celebrated in Longfellow's *Courtship of Miles Standish*, were also among the first settlers. The captain was buried in what is now Standish Cemetery. Here, too, were laid to rest John Alden and Priscilla. John, the last surviving Mayflower passenger, was 88 years old when he died, in 1687.

Today the seacoast town extends over an area of 21 square miles. It has a population of 7,000, served by four municipal cemeteries that have become places of pilgrimage for all who honor the early history of our country.

Standish Cemetery, 1.44 acres in area, is at the junction of Chestnut Street and Pilgrim By-Way. Sited next to the First Meeting House, it was the first burial ground in Duxbury, and the second cemetery in the Plymouth Colony.

In the early days of New England the dead were silently laid to rest without prayers of any kind. The first known funeral sermon in this country was delivered in Duxbury in 1697 when Pastor Ichabod Wiswall officiated at the burial in Standish Cemetery of Capt. Jonathan Alden, a son of John Alden. The oldest memorial stone in Duxbury marks this grave. The date 1697 is still clear.

Three-quarter-acre Dingley

Cemetery in the north part of the town, and one-acre Ashod Cemetery in the west part of Duxbury, were built to accommodate early settlers in the days when roads were little better than Indian trails or cow paths, posing a problem for horse drawn hearses and carriages. Both cemeteries were filled to capacity by 1890.

MAYFLOWER Cemetery, with thirty-five developed acres and thirty acres awaiting development, is located on Tremont Street (Route 3 A) adjacent to the First Parish Church, Unitarian, which was formed in 1632 by Elder William Brewster, a Mayflower passenger who served as pastor for the Plymouth Colony. The church, classic in design, lends religious significance, even though persons of all denominations are buried in

Mayflower Cemetery. The first grave in this cemetery was dug in 1787 for Stephen Russell.

Duxbury voters, aware of an increasing population and realizing that churches could not afford to maintain cemeteries, asked the town meeting to take action and in 1893 a study committee was appointed. The following year, Duxbury chose its first cemetery trustees, namely, Thomas Alden, William J. Alden, Jr., Lawrence Bradford, Elisha Peterson, and Samuel P. Soule. Elisha Peterson was a funeral director and the townspeople continued to avail themselves of his services until 1925.

Duxbury, like all old New England towns, had its quota of private tombs and backyard graves, but most of the unregulated burial spots were so long neglected they are scarcely more than legend now. The Ben Smith tomb,



Formed in 1632 by Elder William Brewster, a Mayflower passenger, the First Parish Church, Unitarian, adds its classic dignity to this view of Mayflower Cemetery.

however, has been carefully preserved, partly due to the intervention of concerned relatives and partly due to its location, diagonally across the street from the church and Mayflower Cemetery.

This lot is bounded by the intersection of Tremont and Depot Streets and by restricted woodland, and is a prime example of the tiny burial lots which would represent such a deterrent to municipal and private construction had the adoption of regulatory burial laws been too long delayed.

Hand hammered epitaphs in

New England cemeteries entrance tourists, and Duxbury boasts one monument which is remembered long after the customary plaintive epitaphs have been forgotten. Asenath, widow of Simeon Soule, died February 25, 1865, and a century later one ponders what inspired the cryptic epitaph: "*The Chisel Can't Help Her Any*".

* * *

WITH John Alden and Capt. Myles Standish buried in Duxbury it seems fitting that the present superintendent, Laurel B. Freeman, is a descendant of Mayflower passengers

Gov. William Bradford, Richard Warren, and George Soule. His personal heritage has inspired his constant efforts to improve the cemeteries.

Largely due to Mr. Freeman's recommendations, perpetual care trust funds, which numbered seven in 1887, have been increased and made mandatory for new lots. Families have been contacted and persuaded to increase earlier, inadequate funds. Perpetual care funds amounting to \$40,336 when Mr. Freeman took office in 1938 now amount to \$269,904.

The main entrance gates to Mayflower Cemetery were a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Ernest H. Bailey, who were both descendants of passengers in the Mayflower. The polished granite posts were erected in 1927 and open into the main avenue between the old and new sections of the cemetery.

The Civil War Memorial Monument stands on the right. To the left stands the 1964 municipal memorial monument erected at a cost of \$3,000, and dedicated to the *Memory of the men and women of Duxbury who served in defense of our Country*.

Duxbury's ancient hearse house still stands but has been used only as a tool shed in recent years. Duxbury tries to modernize: In addition to almost yearly purchases of motorized equipment, the town raised \$2,000 in 1926 for a new receiving vault, and in 1964 erected a service building that cost \$14,538, exclusive of architect's fees. This Colonial-style building houses the superintendent's office, a fire-proof record vault, a colonial waiting room, and sanitary facilities, in addition to the service shop which extends into the basement.

A gift of \$2,000 received from Miss Lucy Hathaway in 1927 permitted the extension of the fence along Tremont Street.

Tourists attracted by ancient cemeteries comment favorably



Top photo (from left): Duxbury cemetery trustees Carl E. Johnson, Dr. Herman C. Bumpus, Ernest W. Chandler, Edward P. Hobart (chairman), Dr. J. Newton Shirley (secretary), and Superintendent Laurel B. Freeman.

Center photo: The administration and service building in Mayflower Cemetery, erected in 1964.

Bottom photo: The receiving vault, on the main avenue of Mayflower Cemetery. It was built in 1926.

on Duxbury's ornamental headstones as well as on ten or more wrought-iron lot fences of elaborate design still standing in Mayflower Cemetery. No attempt has been made to require the removal of fences, although mowing and raking are expedited by present-day regulations prohibiting individual headstones and fenced lots. Owners are now permitted to erect one monument in the center of the lot, and may install flush grave markers.

Recently elderly twin sisters, who owned a non-conforming sand-topped lot bounded by cement building block retaining walls, located within the shadow of the Civil War Memorial Monument, requested that after they were laid to rest their lot should be cleared, graded and grassed. Mr. Freeman had never requested this, but had tactfully suggested the advantages of uniformity, and his courtesy was eventually rewarded by the removal of conditions which had long constituted an eyesore.

Increasing maintenance costs encouraged the trustees to eliminate the six-foot-wide depressed paths which formerly separated all lots in the old section. These paths were graded and many were sectioned off into 4-grave lots.

With the entire cemetery brought level, maximum work is accomplished with two 70 in. Locke mowers and several Bunton trimmers. Two Lo Blowers have been added to remove the heavy fall of leaves from the native oak trees which predomi-



The grave of Captain Myles Standish in Standish Cemetery. Captain Standish died in 1656. Laurel B. Freeman, the superintendent of the Duxbury cemeteries, is a descendant of Mayflower passengers Gov. William Bradford, Richard Warren, and George Soule.

nate throughout the cemetery, although maples and evergreens add contrast and color. Three year-round employees and three or four seasonal laborers take care of the manual details.

* * *

MAYFLOWER Cemetery has a street frontage 2/5ths of a mile long. Fortunately, the old section lies directly across the street from woodland owned by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society, for in accordance with the custom of earlier generations the first row of lots is separated from the highway only by a driveway too narrow to permit modern cars to pass each

Mayflower Cemetery has 35 acres developed, plus 30 acres for future expansion. Wrought iron fences and individual headstones such as these no longer are permitted.

other. The recently-built section has an attractively planted "green belt" at the roadside, which has received considerable praise, especially as the cemetery is being extended towards a residential zone. Duxbury averages 75 burials a year.

Although Duxbury set aside a Veterans' Section, only Civil War Veterans are buried there, as veterans of more recent wars have been interred in private lots in accordance with the wishes of their families.

The trustees and superintendent are alert to the burden that present inflationary trends involve. Under Massachusetts law, annual care fees for lots not yet under perpetual care are not available for direct expenditure by cemetery officials, but are



paid to the general treasury as an offset toward amounts appropriated at town meeting.

Increased interest income on perpetual care funds is infinitesimal compared to soaring maintenance costs, and trust fund income will cover barely 31% of the total annual budget. The remaining 69% will be appropriated at town meeting, but after reduction by the offsetting income only 41% of the total budget will be raised by taxation on real estate. The contribution from taxes is obviously much greater in years when major equipment is purchased. To date the trustees have been reluctant to increase annual fees.

During Mr. Freeman's superintendency, Duxbury has learned to appreciate well-kept cemeteries and the townspeople have willingly assumed the necessary tax burden to prevent the four municipal cemeteries from reverting to the apathetic desuetude common to burial grounds at the turn of the century, and occasionally still found in small towns today.

Working without clerical assistance, Mr. Freeman has painstakingly card-indexed every grave in all the cemeteries, including the exact inscriptions on grave stones and monuments.

The superintendent is a member of the New England Cemetery Association, and of the Massachusetts Cemetery Association. His untiring efforts to improve Duxbury's cemeteries are warmly supported by the present elected, but unpaid, Board of Trustees. The board members are: Edward P. Hobart, chairman; Dr. J. Newton Shirley, secretary, Dr. Herman C. Bumpus, Jr., Ernest W. Chandler, and Carl E. Johnson.

A very small burial ground, located directly behind St. John's Episcopal Church on Washington Street, is not municipally controlled, but is still available, under strict church regulations, for an extremely limited number of graves.

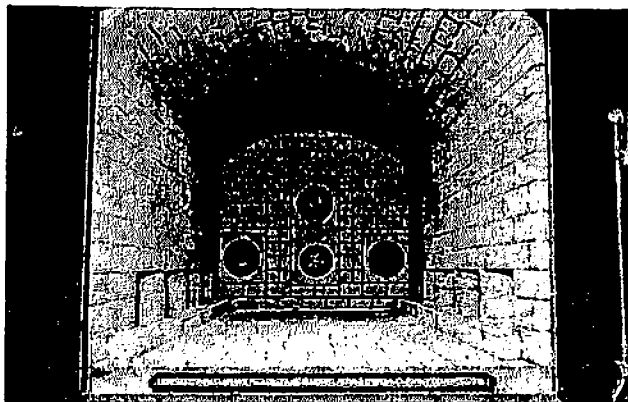
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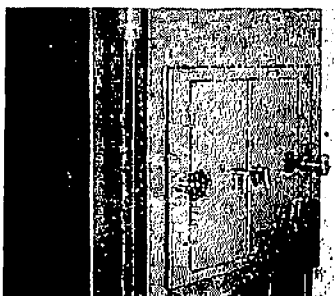
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